

1 Art and Artistry

Bob's Top Ten Apps

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Art Authority for iPad

\$8.99

Having Art Authority is like having the history of Western art in pictures and words on your iPad. The app includes works by hundreds of artists, organized alphabetically by artist and also by periods (called Rooms within the app) that include Early (up to the 1400s), Baroque, Renaissance, Romanticism, Impressionism, Modern, Contemporary, and American.

Tap one of these eight Rooms on the main screen and you'll see its subcategories; tap a subcategory and you can select a specific artist or an overview of that artist's work.

The figure on the left below, for example, shows some of the subcategories in the Modern room, as well as the overlay for the Symbolism category.

If you prefer to see the bigger picture (ha!), tap a Room's name (Modern in the figure on the left below) instead of tapping a subcategory, and you can view the major works and timelines for that period.

Regardless of how you choose to explore the art — alphabetically or by period — you can find a dozen or more works by each artist arranged in a *Show*.

Art Authority offers myriad options for viewing Shows. You can choose your favorite transition or allow the app to select an appropriate one. You can turn on the Ken Burns effect to provide the illusion of motion. You can view thumbnails of all the artwork in a show, and tap individual thumbnails to see the pictures. You can speed up, slow down, stop, or reverse the show at any time, and you can enlarge, shrink, or rotate any picture. You can turn captions on or off, or display them briefly when a picture first appears. You can add music from your iTunes music library to any show, or you can delete any image and never see it again.

That's not all, though. You can also save any image from the app to your iPad's Photos app — or set any image as your wallpaper background. Another option lets you link from any image to the Web site from which it originated; there you can read additional facts and see other images. Of course, Art Authority also includes detailed information about each artist, as shown in the figure on the right. For what it's worth, the text you see in the figure is merely the first of 31 pages of information about Rembrandt.

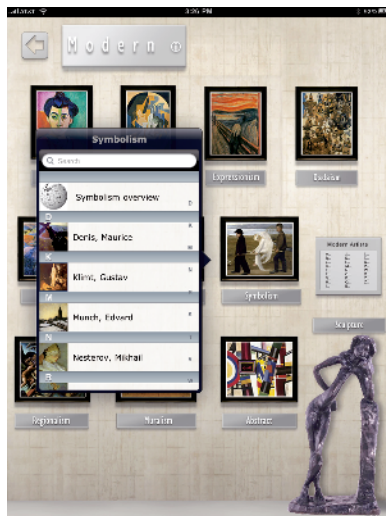
Best features

Art Authority is beautiful, flexible, scholarly, and fun. If you like to look at art or learn about it, you'll find an ample supply of quality artwork and information in Art Authority.

Worst features

Because all the images are pulled from Web sites, the app is more or less useless if you don't have Internet access. Some pictures load slowly or don't load at all, depending upon Web traffic and the originating site's status, although this shortcoming isn't the fault of Art Authority.

To be fair, when you first view a picture, it's cached on your iPad, which makes it available at a later date even if you don't have Internet access.





Brushes

\$7.99

Brushes is a drawing and painting app designed exclusively for the iPad. With a simple, elegant user interface, Brushes offers a powerful toolset for drawing and painting.

Thoughtful touches abound in Brushes. Tap once anywhere on the screen to show or hide the toolbar. Zoom in as much as 1,600% or out to 70% with the customary iPad pinch and unpinch gestures. Pick a color with a single press of your fingertip.

The app is called Brushes, so the obvious place to start exploring is with the brush styles, as shown in the figure on the left below. The app has more than a dozen types — smooth, fine-bristle, rough-bristle, ragged, and many more — which are available in any size from 1 to 64 pixels and offer complete control over the opacity of your strokes.

There's a terrific color picker (shown in the figure on the right below). To change the hue and saturation of the color you want to use for painting, drag the knob (a little white circle) around on the color wheel. Below the color wheel are two sliders. The top slider determines the brightness of the selected color; the bottom slider determines the color's opacity.

Many desktop graphics programs have an eyedropper tool to “pick up” any color in your image and paint with it. There's an eyedropper in the Brushes toolbar, too, but I almost always use the shortcut of pressing my finger in one spot for half a second, which causes the eyedropper tool to pop up directly under my fingertip.

Another cool feature of Brushes is its support for up to six layers. I've seen layers in many desktop graphics programs, but Brushes is one of only a few iPad apps that do layers and do them well. Each layer can be painted independently without affecting the layers above or below. You drag and drop to change the stacking order of the layers, which I find both elegant and intuitive. You have full control over layer opacity, so you can use a semitransparent layer to tint all or part of the layer(s) below. And you can merge any of the layers with any other(s) at any time.

Don't worry if you make a mistake — Brushes has at least ten levels of undo and redo, so you can undo or redo your last ten (or more) actions.

When you're finished with your masterpiece, you can save it in the Brushes gallery so you can easily work on it some more or show it to your friends with Brushes' built-in slideshow. You can export finished pictures to your iPad's Photos app or use the Brushes built-in Web server to view or download your creations over Wi-Fi with any Web browser on any Web-connected computer.

If you're a Mac OS X user, there's a cool free Brushes Viewer that lets you view or export high-resolution versions of your paintings on your Mac. Another interesting feature is that the Brushes Viewer can display a stroke-by-stroke animated replay of the making of your painting, which you can export as a QuickTime movie. Plus, the Brushes Viewer can export paintings at higher resolution (1,920 x 2,880 pixels) than the iPad screen (1,024 x 768).

Best features

The best feature of Brushes is its simple-but-powerful user interface. If you're artistically inclined, there's no limit to the things you can create with Brushes.

Worst features

The way-cool Brushes Viewer isn't available for Windows.





Color Splash for iPad

\$1.99

Some photography apps are like a Swiss Army Knife, with bells, whistles, and features galore. Others, such as Color Splash, focus on doing one thing well. In this case, that one thing is converting a photo to black and white and then enabling you to colorize specific parts of it. Because a picture is worth a thousand words, I could technically tell you to check out the pictures below and move on to the next app.

Never fear, gentle reader; I vowed to tell you what you need to know. Even though that pair of pix says it all, let me tell you how the app works and how easy it is to achieve stunning effects.

Start with a picture. Any picture. In the figures below I started with an HDR (High Dynamic Range) shot I took of an Austin sunset over Lady Bird Lake. When you open a picture in Color Splash, it's converted to black and white automatically. Next it's time to get creative and break out one of the two brushes, called Color and Gray. The Color brush brushes away the black and white to reveal the colors in the original photo. The Gray brush does the opposite — it brushes away color you've revealed with the Color brush, which is handy if you make a mistake or want to zoom in to clean up problem areas.

And tapping the Brush button gives you total control over the size and strength of the paintbrush (that is, your fingertip). Your paintbrushes can be any size, from pencil-thin to fatter than my thumb. You can adjust the brush's opacity from nearly transparent to pretty much opaque. In sum, the brush controls are designed to make precision finger-painting easy. And finally, you can undo and redo brush strokes to your heart's content.



Check out the App Store listing for Color Splash and you'll see a few really stunning examples of the effect done well.

If you make a mistake, double-tap anywhere on the screen and the brush will switch from Color to Gray. Double-tap again and it changes back. It's fast, easy, and one of the most useful shortcuts I've seen in an app.

Tapping the little red dot at the top of the screen shows you the areas you've brushed with the Color brush by displaying them on screen in bright red, as shown in the figure on the left below.

The picture on the right shows my finished Color Splash picture. As you can see, in both images I used the Color brush to reveal the colors in the sky and sunset at the top of the image and the pool and chairs at the bottom. Everything else in the picture — basically the entire middle section — remains black and white.

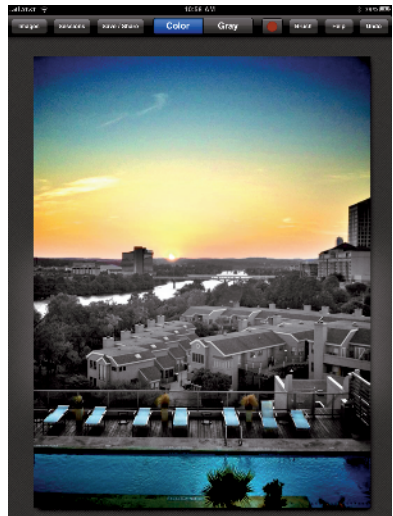
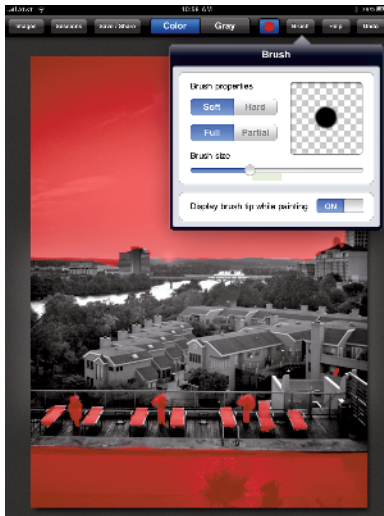
The bottom line is that if a talentless clod like me can achieve stunning (in my humble opinion) artistic effects with Color Splash, just think what you'll be able to do.

Best features

With Color Splash you can create a unique and interesting effect with little effort or talent. It's actually kind of fun and the results are often stunning.

Worst features

There is sometimes a little bit of lag when you are painting. When it happens, it can affect your precision. Luckily, there are unlimited undos.





Photogene for iPad

\$3.99

Photogene is one of my favorite apps. It's the app I use most often when I need to improve a photo I shot with my iPhone. It has most (if not all) the features I need to make a mediocre photo look good or to make a good photo look great.

Photogene has an exceptional user interface, with controls that are easier to understand and use than those of some other photo apps. Photogene also has an extensive list of features, represented by the icons at the bottom of the screen (as shown in the figures):

- ✓ **Scissors:** This cropping tool provides several preset aspect ratios, including 1:1 (square), 3:4 and 4:3 (standard rectangular photos), 9:16 (widescreen), and 3:2 (iPhone screen).
- ✓ **Arrows:** This icon has tools for rotating, flipping, or straightening your photo.
- ✓ **Stacked pictures:** This one reveals the “macro” presets shown in the figure on the left; I’ve applied the *20’s Vintage* preset to the image.
- ✓ **Funnel (at least I think that’s what it is):** This icon reveals tools for sharpening your photo, turning it into a pencil sketch (shown in the figure on the right), and applying effects such as B & W, sepia tone, night vision, and heat map.
- ✓ **Color wheel:** This icon reveals the serious image-editing controls you see in the figure on the right below: exposure, contrast, high-lights, shadows, saturation, color temperature, levels, and RGB. I love the Photoshop-like histogram for adjusting relative brightness levels, as shown in the figure on the right.
- ✓ **Line chart:** This one gives you a Photoshop-like Levels curve tool for precise color correction.
- ✓ **Eyeball:** An easy-to-use red-eye-removal tool.
- ✓ **Star:** This icon enables you to drag a variety of cartoon balloons and shapes onto your photos, with complete control over the outline, fill, and text colors. You also have a choice of five fonts (but none look as much like a comic book as the exclusive font used by Comic Touch).

- ✓ **Square:** Tapping this icon (shown in the figure on the right) closes the frames, backgrounds, and effects options. The tape on the corners of the image is one of the preset frame options; the blue background is one of the background color options; and the reflection below the picture is one of the special-effects options.

I tried a lot of programs with similar features and Photogene delivers the most bang for the buck (okay, four bucks). And, unlike most similar apps, it can edit high-resolution RAW files. If you use your iPad to retouch photos, you should definitely have this app in your arsenal.

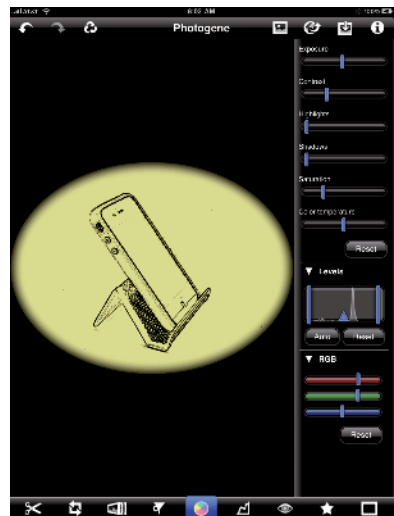
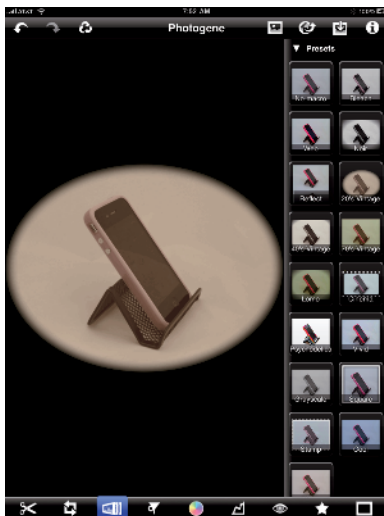
Best features

All of Photogene's features are really quite excellent, so I think the best thing about this app is that it has so many high-quality image-editing tools. The intuitive and uncluttered user interface and unlimited undo/redo support are not too shabby, either.

Worst features

My big complaint is that the shadow-effect options for frames are kind of ugly and there's no way to adjust their transparency.

My minor gripe is that the pencil, reflection, and frame effects work well and deliver beautiful results on most images, but I wish there were more special effects such as crayon, oil paint, mosaic, or watercolor. If those effects existed and looked as good as the pencil, reflection, and most of the frame effects, they'd be awesome!





Strip Designer

\$2.99



This app is fun and easy to use, and it provides numerous creative options for turning your photos into comic strips or graphic novels. And while I enjoy using it on my iPhone, the iPad version provides a much better user experience.

The first thing you do is select one of the many available page layout templates, as shown in the figure on the left below. Then you populate the panels by choosing photos from your Photos app library — or a map of any location in the world. Inserting a map or maps of your creation into a comic strip is a brilliant integration of iPad technologies.

Once you've selected a picture or map for a panel, you can modify it in various ways if you want. In the figure on the right below, for example, I'm applying the halftone filter to the picture of Allie and the dog (top left). You can apply any or all of the other effects — grayscale, sepia tone, invert, sketch, and so on — to any image or map in any panel of your comic.

But that's just the beginning. Now you can add embellishments like cartoon balloons, text blocks, shapes, stickers, borders, cutouts, and more. Cartoon balloons do more than just let you put words in someone's mouth. They also include arrows, stars, hearts, and ovals.

Then there are dozens of interesting stickers that let you make your strip even more comic-like. I used a couple — Ka-Boom and BAM — in the figure on the right.

I'm also pretty impressed with the Cutout feature, which lets you store an image or part of image — say, your logo or other “branding” — and reuse it in any panel or page with one tap.

Now, in addition to all the creative possibilities I've described so far, you also have the option of choosing a different page-layout template for any page at any time. Better still, you can preview your images in a number of different layouts very quickly and easily.



You can change page layout templates at any time, but here's a word to the wise: Do it *after* you add your photos or maps but *before* you add any text, bubbles, stamps, or other embellishments to your panels. And here's why: Some or all of the embellishments you place will appear in the wrong location in other page layouts. I'm just sayin'

you'll save yourself work if you try different page layouts *before* you embellish rather than after.

Finally, as you'd expect, Strip Designer has export and social-media options galore, making it easy to share your strips with others via e-mail (at normal or high resolution), Facebook, Flickr, and Twitter.

It adds up to easy-to-use tools for creating comic strips that look (at least in my humble opinion) extremely cool, as you can clearly see in the figure on the right.

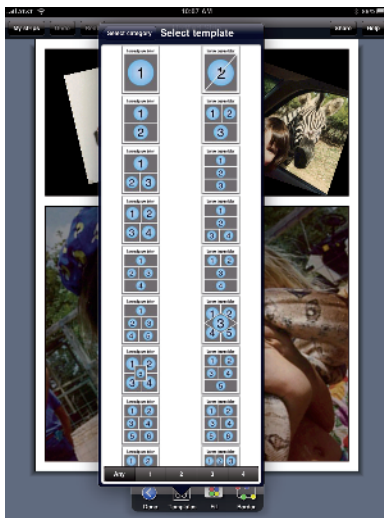
Or not. But if you think my comic shows even an inkling of promise, you'll have a ball with Strip Designer.

Best features

Choices. This app is all about choices. Its myriad of page templates, filters, visual effects, cartoon balloons, stickers, and cutouts provide almost infinite creative options.

Worst features

Choosing a different page template can shift elements, which can cause extra work for you.





Adobe Photoshop Express

Free



Another excellent choice for improving photos, Adobe Photoshop Express has all the features you'd expect from an app that bears the Photoshop name — crop, rotate, flip, exposure, saturation, tint, and color-to-black-and-white conversions. I don't much care for some of the filters and special effects, such as Border and Rainbow, but I like almost everything else about the app.

Wondering why I recommend it? Well, I really like the way it's integrated with my Photoshop.com account. I can upload to and download from my online photo library and use the more advanced Photoshop.com image-editing tools for images that need more help than even Photogene can provide.



ArtStudio

\$4.99

I picked this excellent, pro-quality painting-and-drawing program because many people think it's every bit as useful for professional illustration as the aforementioned Brushes. I'm not an artist by any stretch of the imagination, but I'd have a hard time choosing one over the other. In this case, they're both excellent.

But ArtStudio has one more thing Brushes does not: Art Lessons. Though I'm still not an artist, I did learn to draw a passable dog and cat. Kinda sorta. The lessons show you how to create a 3D drawing, and how to draw animals, faces, and humans. They're even kind of fun as you trace over every stroke in each lesson.



The Guardian Eyewitness

Free

It's brought to you by Canon but they're not all in your face about it (a discreet little logo that's not that bad). The app showcases "the world's most distinctive and provocative photographs." It's just a fancy photo gallery but the photos are generally superb. And the Pro Tips that accompany them — such as "very fast shutter speed" and "shallow depth of field" — are useful if you are the type of photographer who likes to know how to "do stuff" to make your pictures more interesting or dramatic.

Even if you hate photography, check it out for the pictures, which are often spectacular.



Reel Director

\$3.99



Reel Director is an amazing app that lets you do great things with video files. It's hard to believe, but Reel Director lets you combine and rearrange clips, add text overlays, add really cool opening and closing credits and title cards, and — my favorite feature — includes 28 really sweet transitions, which have animated previews and can be applied globally to an entire project.

Reel Director isn't Final Cut Pro or even iMovie, but it does let you do amazing things with video using nothing but your iPad. And since it's a hybrid app, you can use the same \$3.99 app on your iPhone or iPod touch.



TiltShift Generator for iPad — Fake DSLR

\$2.99

This one's another one-trick pony but that trick is pretty slick This app creates dramatic depth-of-field effects that look almost as good as that amazing depth of field you can only really capture with an expensive Digital SLR camera and a decent lens.

To give your photo depth of field, you tap the spot you want in focus. In a few seconds, your picture magically appears as if it had been shot with a very shallow depth of field. Using a great set of interactive slider controls, you can adjust the depth-of-field effect in near-real time.

Used judiciously, this app can turn a pretty good photo shot with a cheap camera (or a phone) into a stunning shot.